

Message Text

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44

ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3427

INFO AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY SANAA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USINT CAIRO

RUFNRS/USINT ALGIERS 2146

USUN NEW YORK 585

S E C R E T TUNIS 5894

EXDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: XF, T, MOPS, MASS

SUBJECT: DESTABILIZING EFFECTS OF SIXTH FLEET MOVE-
MENTS AND REPORTS OF US SHIPMENTS OF
ARMS TO ISRAEL

1. REPORTS OF US SIXTH FLEET MOVEMENTS IN EASTERN MEDITER-
RANEAN, TOGETHER WITH RUMORS THAT USG WILL RESUPPLY
ISRAEL WITH ARMS, ARE BEGINNING TO CAUSE APPREHENSION
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AMONG TUNISIANS-- AND I WOULD SUPPOSE THROUGHOUT AREA. IN
WAKE OF THESE REPORTS, WE ALREADY SENSE A COOLER RECEPTION
AT MINISTRY OF DEFENSE, WHICH HAS JUST SENT OFF PERHAPS
1,000 OR SO TROOPS TO FIGHT WITH EGYPT.

2. GENERAL ASSUMPTION IS THAT WHEN SIXTH FLEET MOVES EAST IT IS DOING SO FOR CONTINGENCY PURPOSES OF AIDING ISRAEL. THERE IS LITTLE DISPOSITION TO BELIEVE THAT MOVEMENT OF SIXTH FLEET TO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN MIGHT WELL BE TO PREPARE FOR POSSIBLE EVACUATION OF AMERICAN CITIZENS IN AREA. EMERGING TUNISIAN FEAR, FLOWING FROM REPORTS THAT U.S. CONGRESSMEN ARE ADVOCATING IMMEDIATE RESUPPLY OF AIRCRAFT AND ARMS TO ISRAEL, IS THAT MOVEMENT OF SIXTH FLEET MAY SOMEHOW BE CONNECTED WITH SUCH AN ARMS RESUPPLY EFFORT.

3. IN OUR CONTACTS WITH TUNISIANS WE ARE SEEKING TO ALLAY TUNISIAN SUSPICIONS. WE ARE POINTING OUT THAT SIXTH FLEET MOVEMENT IN EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN IS ROUTING PRE-CAUTION RELATED TO POSSIBLE NEED FOR EVACUATION, AND THAT USG HAS NO DESIRE TO INFLAME SITUATION. WE ARE HOLDING TO STANDARD POSITION THAT WE DO NOT COMMENT ON DETAILS OF OUR MILITARY SUPPLY RELATIONSHIP WITH COUNTRIES IN MIDDLE EAST.

4. NEVERTHELESS, WE MUST EXPECT SNOWBALLING OF POPULAR CONCERN AND ANTI-AMERICANISM AS REPORTS CONTINUE. IF, MEANWHILE, ARAB ARMIES SUFFER MAJOR REVERSES -- AND TUNISIAN TROOPS ARE KILLED IN PROCESS -- THIS COULD WELL ERUPT INTO DISTURBANCES DIRECTED AT AMERICANS AND AMERICAN PROPERTY. IN THIS SITUATION BASIS WOULD HAVE BEEN PROVIDED FOR PINNING MUCH OF BLAME FOR ARAB DEFEAT ON US.

5. FOR THIS REASON I URGE THAT WASHINGTON DENY REPORTS OF ANY UNUSUAL SIXTH FLEET MOVEMENTS AND DEVIATE FROM THE NORMAL PRACTICE BY STATING PUBLICLY THAT USG HAS NO INTENTION OF PROVIDING ISRAEL WITH ADDITIONAL ARMS WHILE HOSTILITIES CONTINUE-- UNLESS USSR MAKES MASSIVE SHIPMENTS TO ARAB SIDE. AS LONG AS WE ARE CONFIDENT THAT ISRAEL PROPER IS NOT THREATENED (I.E. INTEGRITY OF STATE OF ISRAEL IS NOT THREATENED) -- AS OUR ASSESSMENTS MUST UNDOUBTEDLY
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DEMONSTRATE -- WE SHOULD MAKE PARTICULAR EFFORT TO AVOID ACTIONS WHICH MIGHT INFLAME ARAB EMOTIONS, INCLUDING GIVING THEM CONVENIENT EXCUSE FOR BLAMING US IF AND WHEN THEIR ARMIES SUFFER MAJOR REVERSES. MOVEMENT OF SIXTH FLEET TO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN (OR AT LEAST PUBLIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT BY US OF SUCH MOVEMENT) AND POPULAR ARAB BELIEF IN REPORTS OF PROSPECTIVE USG ARMS RESUPPLY TO ISRAEL (OWING IN PART TO OUR FAILURE TO DENY THEM) MAY WELL TRIGGER A CHAIN REACTION OF ANTI-AMERICAN ACTS THROUGHOUT ARAB WORLD WHICH COULD ULTIMATELY EVEN HAVE IMPLICATIONS FOR OIL SUPPLY.

6. I FRANKLY AM UNABLE TO UNDERSTAND WHY WE HAVE TO MOVE

SIXTH FLEET IN CURRENT SITUATION. FIGHTING BETWEEN ISRAELIS AND ARAB ARMIES IS OCCURING IN "OCCUPIED TERRITORY", IN TERRITORY WHICH INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY HAS ACKNOWLEDGED SHOULD EVENTUALLY BE RETURNED TO ARABS AND, INDEED, IN THAT SMALL PORTION OF TERRITORY WHICH EVEN ISRAELI GOVERNMENT IN ITS MOST AMBITIOUS PLAN HAS NEVER CLAIMED FOR ITS OWN IN CONTEXT OF BOUNDARIES ENVISAGED IN ULTIMATE PEACE SETTLEMENT. OF COURSE, UNSC RESOLUTION 242 SAID ISRAEL SHOULD WITHDRAW ONLY IF ARABS AGREED TO LASTING PEACE, AND RESOLUTION OBVIOUSLY DID NOT HAVE IN MIND UNILATERAL ARAB EFFORT TO REGAIN THIS TERRITORY. BUT POINT I AM MAKING IS THAT ARAB-ISRAELI FIGHTING AT EXTREMITIES OF OCCUPIED TERRITORY DOES NOT SEEM TO WARRANT UNUSUAL US MILITARY ACTIVITY, ESPECIALLY GIVEN POTENTIAL HARM THAT THIS ACTIVITY CAN CAUSE TO OVERALL AMERICAN INTERESTS IN AREA.

7. DECISION TO MOVE SIXTH FLEET FOR POSSIBLE EVACUATION PURPOSES SHOULD BE CAREFULLY WEIGHED IN LIGHT OF FOREGOING. IS THERE SUFFICIENT PROSPECT OF NEED TO EVACUATE AMERICAN PERSONNEL BY SEA TO JUSTIFY CAUSING THE COMMOTION WHICH THIS MOVE CREATES? (MOST PAST EVACUATIONS FROM MIDDLE EAST HAVE BEEN BY AIR.) OR IS IT MORE LIKELY THAT SIXTH FLEET MOVE BECOMES SELF-GENERATING; DOES IT NOT CREATE OR CONTRIBUTE TO CONDITIONS IN AREA WHICH EVENTUALLY REQUIRE EVACUATION OF AMERICANS? I WAS STRUCK IN FIRST DAYS OF MIDDLE EAST WAR BY ABSENCE OF ANTI-AMERICAN CRITICISM IN LOCAL PRESS - UNTIL REPORTS STARTED CIRCULATING ABOUT
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SIXTH FLEET MOVEMENT AND US ARMS RESUPPLY TO ISRAEL. IT IS ENTIRELY POSSIBLE THAT IF WE COULD JUST STAY CLEAR OF CONFLICT, WE WOULD COME OUT OF THIS WAR WITH OUR PEOPLE AND OUR INTERESTS IN AREA UNAFFECTED -- AND THUS BE IN EXCELLENT POSITION TO RENEW OUR EFFORTS WITH REGARD TO A SETTLEMENT.

8. THIS IS BASED ON ASSESSMENT THAT EGYPTIANS AND SYRIANS HAVE LIMITED OBJECTIVE OF ESTABLISHING

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TRIPOLI
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